

Beirut Boat Show whets appetite with a taste of aquatic luxury



Around 200 luxury boats are on display.

BEIRUT: The entrance to the Beirut Boat Show 2014 offered a stunning view of the hundreds of millions of dollars-worth of luxury boats docked in the otherwise industrial and somewhat decrepit port area.

The trade and showcase event for the country's maritime industries opened Wednesday evening at Beirut's Pier 1 and will continue through the weekend. Each year, it attracts a mixture of visitors – from interested buyers and boat owners to curious onlookers.

And with around 200 luxury brands on display, there was plenty to see. A Maserati Ghibli welcomed show-goers at the entrance, as did diamond jewelry and luxury watches from W. Salamoon and Sons.

Stands selling high-end leather goods and vodka martinis dotted the exhibition space.

At Sea Pros, a Lebanese company and one of the world's biggest distributors of luxury boats, sales associates were showing off all kinds of nautical novelties, from watersport toys to \$6 million yachts bobbing in the dock.

Among the yacht accessories was a collection of Seabobs, a watersport gadget falling somewhere between a body board and a jet ski.

"These are very popular with people who have big yachts," manager Pierre Kassab told *The Daily Star*.

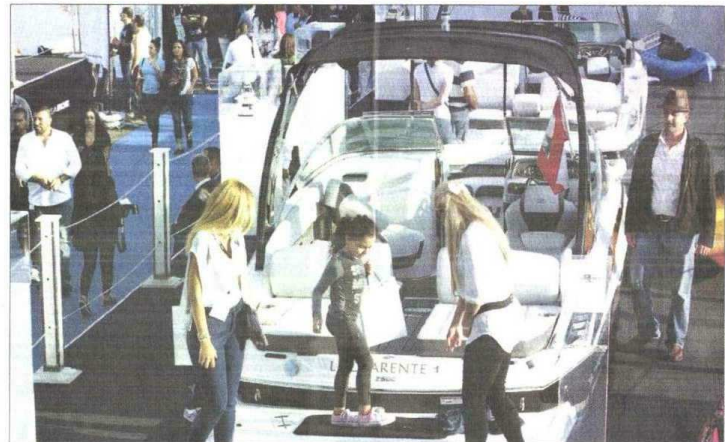
Seabobs are high-end toys that propel users through the surface of the water at up to 20 kmh or down

to 40 meters under the sea. Though they cost between 10,000 and 14,000 euros a pop, many yacht owners get two or three of them to keep on the boat, Kassab said.

Advocates for the country's diverse watersports, like Lebanon Water Festival, have driven up interest in seaside activities in recent years.

Another innovation on display can rough up the country's waters for water-skiers and surfers. Mastercraft Gen 2 boats include award-winning technology that creates a customizable wave trail in their wake for surfing and other watersports, explained salesman Rawad Bou Maacher.

"You can take it out and surf behind the boat all day," he said,



The show looks set to benefit from boosted investment in waterfront facilities.

showing off the customizable vinyl siding and colorful upholstery options. The seats rose to reveal coolers underneath and can be folded down into beds.

"It also has an amazing built-in sound system."

At the opening ceremony, Tourism Minister Michel Pharaon spoke about the myriad projects aiming to expand the country's coastal infrastructure.

"Projects for the marina and associated waterfront facilities in Lebanon are currently being constructed with the aim of attracting luxury boats and yachts," he said.

"Moreover, new harbors are being developed in order to endorse Lebanon's position on the map of

luxury boat harbors in the region."

One such luxury yacht was a 26.6-meter Ferretti 870, whose junior sailors, Charbel Imad and Elie Sfeir, were kind enough to lead a tour through the floating residence. Below deck, the hull was more lavishly laid out than most family apartments, with four bedrooms (each with its own bathroom), two guestrooms and a VIP room with a walk-in closet and skylight.

On deck, an enclosed salon featured white leather wrap-around sofas, a well-stocked liquor cabinet, a minibar and outdoor dining table. The yacht was almost exclusively furnished in white and light-colored wood and parquet to keep the close quarters open and airy, said Sfeir.

"You have to use all of the space," Imad chimed in before leading a tour deep below deck, where closet-sized rooms housed the captain and crew. And up on the second-level deck was more lounge space, a built-in grill and a hot tub.

Though priced at around \$6 million, it's an investment that an increasing number of people around the region are prepared to make, said Albert Aoun, chairman of organizing group IFP at the opening ceremony.

"The world and the region are witnessing a big development in the yachting and boating industries, which are considered smart and lucrative investments given boats and yacht retain value in the long term." – *The Daily Star*

The Daily Star Photo/Muhammad Chay